

Resource Stewardship

Introduction/Definition

The responsible conduct or performance of any form of research involves the responsible use of resources that support the activity. This applies equally to activities that make use of research methodologies in various disciplines though such activities might not be defined as research *per se* under regulations or directives. Of obvious concern in this matter are the finances that support the effort. However, resources also must include time and effort, equipment usage, space allocation, facilities usage, personnel contributions whether direct or in indirect support, follow-on requirements, and other logistic factors or support functions. For all of these, what is required is a mature programmatic and consistent sense of stewardship.

Core Points

1. Research and research-related efforts are wide and diverse. They are interdisciplinary and often involve a wide range of factors. Research can be sponsored by extramural agencies either within the US government or from private sector universities/entities or international sponsors. In the case of non-government sponsors, agreements are required. In all cases, sponsors will have financial and other resource compliance requirements including those of co-sponsoring agencies. It is the sponsors who “own” the dollars provided and therefore have the right to determine how such finances are to be used and what the funds support. Investigators and institutions must be clear about such requirements and responsibly implement the same.
2. Research is not restricted to sponsored efforts. It can also be an intramural activity supported from within the particular institution or agency. It can also be an investigator-initiated activity wherein an individual conducts systematic research analyses of various efforts in which the individual is ordinarily involved. Such investigator-initiated activities, while not “funded” by a grant or contract or cooperative agreement, still make use of finances and other resources that require responsible management and stewardship.
3. A key concept for individuals and institutions to remember is that finance and resource allocation support research. However they do not define what research is. This is important to maintain a balance in present and future portfolio expansion, mission development, and strategic planning.
4. Central to responsible financial and resource management is stewardship. Stewardship is a paradigmatic approach whereby one ensures the appropriate, permissible, prudent, and intended usage of resources on behalf of another who is the actual owner. In terms of research and research-related activities, stewardship means that sponsored finances, intramural funding, and the usage of all other resources for the efforts involved are consistent and compliant with the approved scope of work and the intentions of the sponsor and the reasonable needs of the effort at hand.

5. It is the responsibility of investigators, their staff, superiors, and institutions to obtain absolute clarity about the terms and conditions attached to financial and resource requirements for any research or research-related effort. In pre-award negotiations, sponsors and awardees must be mutually transparent about intentions, requirements, capabilities, and capacities on all levels. All parties must be clear about resource and financial requirements including restrictions or special compliance parameters.
6. All parties must practice complete professional honesty and fairness. This extends to the personal sense of professionalism and propriety of all involved. All personnel must remain vigilantly aware that any misrepresentation or resource misuse can create impacts that can adversely affect the common good.
7. Throughout the post-award process, transparency and propriety must be maintained. At no time are award funds to be used, perceived or advertised as the personal property of the researchers. Resource stewardship always precludes any sense of personal ownership.
8. Research requires regular reporting and various levels of compliance review or audit. These are set by the sponsor and require adherence. For intramural efforts, systems and controls are to be in place to assure appropriate and fair review of efforts made, especially to ensure appropriate research administration and management. However, assessments must also be made to ensure that the research effort or efforts are supported sufficiently to achieve the intention of the scope of work.
9. When changes or new results affect the scope of work such that finances and resource requirements are impacted, researchers and their institutions must contact the respective sponsor to meet any budget reallocations or other resource management requirements. The reassignment of budgets or other resource allocations ordinarily requires justification to and approval by the sponsor. However, to meet possible emergency needs, researchers and sponsors are strongly urged to lay out with clarity beforehand during pre-award negotiations any situations in which such approvals might be assumed. Yet, even when such approvals are permitted to be assumed, researchers should maintain records as to what conditions arose, what adjustments had to be made, and what positive and negative impacts these may have upon the future success of the effort.
10. To ensure that research responsibility and stewardship is appropriately appreciated, researchers and their institutions should engage sponsors in routine assessments of some type. Demonstrating real-world stewardship efforts supports the success of the individual project and also adds to the appreciation of sponsors for the mature research leadership of the awardee institution itself.
11. As part of its internal responsibility, institutions in which research is performed must negotiate reasonable indirect cost rates or, as may be more appropriate, reasonable overhead reimbursements from sponsors for internal resource support.
12. Researchers and their institutions must clearly maintain responsible resource stewardship within Cooperative Research and Development Agreements, Memoranda of

Understanding or Agreement etc. Also of importance is the maintenance of responsibility of fairness for all other award types, royalties etc.

13. Institutions must clearly adhere to the same principles of responsible finance/resource stewardship when awarding research efforts from the institution to extramural subawardees. Institutions and individual researchers must ensure clearly, accurately, completely, and consistently any and all resource requirements. This includes those from higher authority to the institution itself, and therefore incumbent on all subawardees. This applies to additional requirements of the institution. In all cases, all must clearly understand that all requirements are incumbent on all parties involved. For any and all related areas, the institution should document that it has communicated all requirements to extramural subawardees.

14. Maintaining a consistent and responsible sense of resource stewardship is critical to the strategic and tactical development of the research mission or portfolio of the institution or department etc.

15. Of utmost importance is the need to educate and deepen continually all personnel in the fact that financial/resource stewardship is central to maintaining without exception one's commitment to the public trust from which and to which all research and research-related efforts are ordered.

Points for Reflection

1. Does the institution, local departments, and research related personnel have clarity regarding requirements and standards for maintaining responsible financial and resource stewardship?
2. What systems might be developed to increase greater awareness, transparency, compliance, and ethical propriety for responsible finance/resource stewardship?
3. What means can be enacted to educate and deepen all personnel in responsible resource stewardship?

References

BUMEDINST 6500.3. As found at:

<http://www.med.navy.mil/directives/ExternalDirectives/6500.3.pdf>

Federal Acquisitions Regulation. As found at: <https://www.acquisition.gov/far/>

Defense Federal Acquisitions Regulation. As found at:

<http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap/dars/dfarspgi/current/index.html>

Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation 7000.14-R. As found at:
<http://comptroller.defense.gov/fmr/>

Department of Defense Instruction 3210.7. As found at:
<http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/321007p.pdf>

Kulakowski, E., Chronister, L. (Ed). (2006). *Research Administration and Management*. Boston. Jones and Bartlett.

National Research Council. *Integrity in Scientific Research*. (2002). Washington, DC. The National Academies Press.

Norris, J., Youngers, J. *A Guide to Managing Federal Grants for Colleges and Universities*. (2005). National Association of College and University Business Officers and the National Council of University Research Administrators.

In addition to the above, the General Services Administration offers beneficial and important resources for finances, contracting, and resource management. Individuals should consult the GSA website at: <http://www.gsa.gov>.